

# Report from the research: “The Factory of Culture – Paid and Voluntary Work at Cultural Festivals”\*

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## Introduction

Due to their intensity and temporary nature, cultural festivals require a strictly task based organisation of labour and, in consequence, staff who will work seasonally and temporarily. Therefore, the festival industry compels temporary and flexible forms of employment, such as civil-law contracts and self-employment. It is also based on unpaid, voluntary work. In other words, due to their specifics, festivals build an efficient and flexible workforce that receives low salary or none at all and which depends on the circle of festival events. Therefore, many questions arise: what stimulates and disciplines that workforce, and how does it do it?; does such a situation generate new conflicts, problems and defence strategies?; what is the ethos of such a job?; what may the situation of those employed in festival industry tell us about social and economic changes mentioned above?; what does the survey of those who work in festival industry tell us about the changes in the cultural sector and changes of work in general?

## Developing a grass-roots theory of labour at cultural festivals

While conceptualising work issues at cultural festivals we have encountered problems unexamined in the Polish context. Hence, we were looking for inspirations and references in analyses of similar spheres done in different geographical and historical places; while for the Polish context we referred to a few review articles. Although they were helpful in terms of a system, and the way cultural sector works, they were limited tools in the context of cultural festivals, because of the lack of references to work conditions in that sector in the context of its neo-liberalisation in Poland. Therefore, that specific empirical and theoretical void directed us first of all towards the qualitative not the quantitative research and secondly, towards the grounded theory method (mostly this one presentedn by Kathy Charmaz), which seemed to us the most adequate to generate questions and to find answers to how the work and life conditions of festivals' employees are shaped.

The research material is based on in-depth, partially structured interviews. However, the scope of topics was very wide and conversations mostly referred to: problems that the employees encountered at work, their motivation, expectations towards current work, as well as their future prospects. Answers that gradually appeared

in the interviews have been then confronted with the analysis of data and documents that the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage made available. Budgets of particular festivals and general data on their financial support have also been confronted with the interviews. Such an analysis gave us a stronger, structural base for conclusions made over the interpretation of interviews. One question that surprised us, but also showed us the benefits of the grounded theory, was the fact that data obtained from interviews mirrored the data from the documents.

In total there were 48 interviews with the employees, co-workers and volunteers who worked at 12 festivals financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage located in 6 different cities in Poland. In our sampling most interviewees were those employed with civil-law contracts (27) or volunteers (16), and only 5 people had a permanent contract. Work experience, regardless the contract, fluctuated from several months to 8 years and differed also according to the number of festivals organised (from one to dozen). All kinds of posts have been included in the sampling. The vast majority of interviewees were either employees or volunteers who did simple service works, including organisational and maintenance works, such as, for example: festival centre service, artists' host, volunteer team management), the minority dealt with programmes of the festivals (only two interviewees held a managerial post). The age of the participants fluctuated between 18 and 46 years old, however the majority was very young (25-30 year-olds). Only the analysis of interviews showed that work at festivals is the main source of income for the little minority (and sporadically the only source), the majority then have different sources of income with a significant number of temporary jobs, while 10 interviewees were supported by their parents.

## **Labour process in the factory of culture**

We would like to approach the issue of work in cultural sector from the angle of the labour process, that means paying attention mostly to the issue of autonomy, control and identity creation in a workplace. Wage labour in its definition is a sphere of heteronomy: an area of activity where the activity of an employee is dependent on the expectations and aims of an employer. That element in a capitalist society is called work and it differs from other forms of activities: "a hired gardener »works«; a miner who grows leek in his back garden does a freely chosen activity". However, the character of that dependence is not always the same and it cannot be concluded from the employment itself. On the one hand,

a capitalist employer might be only interested in the product of work, which employment gives him the right to; on the other hand, however, an employer may take over control (in a form of appropriating) over the whole labour process, paying attention to even the smallest activity of an employee. Autonomist Marxism presents that issue on a difference between formal and real subsumption of labour under capital describing the level of capital's involvement in a labour process. It shows how much it is organised by capital agents and how much of its autonomy it preserves within the frame of capitalist production. Harry Braverman in his work entitled *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has thoroughly described the historical process of the decline of the use of skilled labours (in heavy industry and offices) who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century still had their quasi crafting character. The book also describes the decrease of the control that an employee used to have over his or her work. Braverman sees the causes of those phenomena as a result of scientific management approach, the so called "taylorism", that took its name from its inventor Frederick Winslow Taylor, which regulates the activities of labours in the smallest details, as well as of utilization of different variants of assembly line that dictates tempo and rhythm of labour. . In consequence the labour process has been changed not only into a mundane series of routine and imposed tasks, but it also has deprived employees of control over their time and intensity of work (time for each task was specifically set in order to get the maximal intensity of work). It has also resulted in deskilling, changing qualified and independent labourers into deprived-of-any-specifics automatons to perform particular tasks and simultaneously limiting their bargaining power in negotiations with their employers. However, the importance of those reflections for the analysis of festival labour process refers to the fact that a modern capitalism is of quite the opposite trend – shifting from real to formal subsumption, from detailed regulation and control over labour process to stimulate employees' independence, decisiveness and self-organisation. A cycle of immaterial labour characteristic for post-Fordist branches of industry and services described by Maurizio Lazzarato has been based not on a top-down organisation of production process in a factory, but on the so called "diffuse factory" where autonomous productive synergies has been stimulated and which product was later taken over by the capital.

In that context, cultural production (and maybe production of cultural events even more), plays a special role. It serves as a well-developed and integrated into contemporary capitalist economy example of post-Fordist production. The example of the way the autonomous productive synergies of immaterial labour function inside a hierarchical

system of capitalist production. Organisational forms of production we have analysed fluctuate from grass roots, self-organisational, based on organisers' own means and driven by pure enthusiasm processes to great, formal and hierarchical quasi-institutions that are cyclically established to produce a particular event. However, we are certain that there is a kind of continuity, even a chronological one when a small event, organised by a group of enthusiasts, grows and becomes more bureaucratic. The analysis of such continuity will enable us to understand better the mechanisms of limiting formal subsumption of immaterial labour.

### **Production aims, criteria of efficiency and time**

The aim of a production process in the festival industry is an organisation of a cultural event (or a series of such events that make a festival) within given limits of time, means and power. However, there are no strict quantitative criteria (neither a book value) of an evaluation whether a cultural event was a successful one. A direct production process is aimed at quite steady realisation of carefully planned programme of events. However, the most important is a "quality" – the quality of presented works, the quality of their presentation and hospitality services, which is an (inter)subjective and negotiable category.

Such a situation causes serious consequences for possible mechanisms of control and supervision over the labour process and in fact excludes the use of all bureaucratic, indirect, quantitative methods of control that are common for different branches of economy (from a financial sector that sets profit margins for a company to quantitative measures of labour efficiency such as a number of produced elements or customers serviced within limited time and means). Yet to control the quality of work a potential supervisor may only come to a place and see a particular outcome. Hence, it is the outcome not a process itself that is controlled and supervised.

### **Work time**

Despite the fact that the production process of a festival is not aimed at efficiency (that is at magnification of production within a time unit) work at a festival might be incredibly intensive and time-consuming.

Weronika: Since November it is like that, that we work 8 hours, in December also, but in January it is a work 15 hours a day seven days a week. And when it finishes [name of the festival] everybody is like zombie.

The time of a festival as well as the time just before it is for employees a time of a long, intensive effort, stress and long working hours. The need to meet the deadline set by the management turns out to be a mechanism that disciplines as effectively as an assembly line.

Maja: There's no way out, it's that kind of a machine that has already started working and you can't go back. And that was a nuisance for me, when I was sitting 12 hours and I didn't, let's say, get that warm meal and I didn't even have a possibility to get out, because it was all going on all the time.

As time is an important element of every labour process, in case of event production it becomes the main factor that puts pressure on employees' activities. For an event in order to get to consumers it has to take place on a particular day and takes up a particular amount of time. For it to have a coherent form, all elements that are part of the event have to be coordinated in time. In that way, despite the lack of "efficiency" criterion, time remains the key element of the production process: a "dictatorship of deadlines" and the need that "all of it goes on all the time" set absolutely intensity of their work. Contrary to inexorable time of the event the work time seems to be endlessly flexible.

Karol: Yeah, in general work in the cultural industry is not a 9 to 5 job. It doesn't work like that. Here you work all the time and often at night then during the day you sleep it off, so these are totally flexible working hours and a lot of commissions means that you practically don't have personal life.

Festivals' employees do not work particular hours nor number of hours a day or a week, but as much as it is necessary (from the production process' angle) – they sacrifice their sleep and other life activities and personal life, if there is such a need. For employers work time is not an element that they have to deal with, because they pay their employees for the outcome not for the time they spent at work.

Wiktor: No, of course there are some deadlines, that till.... Until some time I have to, for example, finish some texts. Of course we're now like talking about work between festivals, aren't we? During festivals every hour is set. [...] And at curatorial work, when somebody..., I have to contact artists, deal with something I have definitely more time. Several months for example. And for example work I'm given in case of [name of the festival] which takes places in November. Then I start work and... since May, actually, I have a task and I know what to do. So I'm like adjusting everything to my spare time, so .... and that's what I really appreciate at work at festivals (laugh). That I can adjust, that I can work at night, because then I work best.

On the other hand, exactly the same mechanism works in such a way that when there are no deadlines to meet and there is still a lot of time to a festival, employees regain almost total control over their work time and they can organise it according to their own needs and preferences.

## **A network of cooperation**

While defining the cycle of immaterial production Lazzarato wrote: "The location in which it [immaterial labour] operates is outside in the society at large, at a territorial level that we could call »the basin of immaterial labor.« Small and sometimes very small »productive units« (often consisting of only one individual) are organized for specific ad hoc projects, and may exist only for the duration of those particular jobs. The cycle of production comes into operation only when it is required by the capitalist; once the job has been done, the cycle dissolves back into networks and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities". It seems that such a description matches well the cycle of festival production.

Franciszek: The festival is organised by [name of the association] – that's how it's called – which as early as a year ago had its headquarter in [name of the city]. And in fact there are employed people, who have civil-law contracts, and there're only few of them. Maybe five tops, to be honest. And these are those most important guys, so Mr [name of the person], who is the owner and a kind of the founder of all that, there's a managing director, a festival art director and

of course, you know, accountants, so these are like technical posts, and maybe two other people. And those are like.... This is the hard core which organises the festival, so only those few people. While all the rest have civil-law contracts and now it depends. Guests' department director is employed few months earlier, because he has a lot of work related to coordination of hundreds of guests. So he is employed much earlier. Now depending on how... many duties you have, you are earlier employed to arrange all time schedules or some arrivals, departures and so on, or some other things.

Wiktor: Yeah, I'm like having hope that in few years it'll result in a full-time, concrete, big... big event. And I know that some people in [name of the city] who also do that also want to work like that, so I think we'll put our forces together.

Creation of a network of cooperating people or institutions constitutes a starting point for each festival production process. In fact, almost nothing else is needed. Hence, the impression that festivals may come, in a way, from nothing. Institutions that organise them may be disproportionately small compared to the event they organise. It is because they function rather in a network or cooperation than work on their own. The majority of means used in festival production is not in the hands of organisers. It is scattered between different individual and institutional subjects. The festival production process can be understood as local and temporary activation of relationships and a network of contacts. It is the point of intersection of a trajectory of heterogeneous subjects that function independently on one another, but at the same time which are dependent on such meetings, these are: artists, cultural institutions, local councils, public administration clerks, private sponsors, subcontractors, employees of cultural industry, volunteers and audience. Organisers function in that network as initiative subjects which also control the meeting to give it a more coherent, festival form, of which finally they become symbolic owners.

Maciej: It is just related to such a technical aspect of support, if there's no financial support then it should be, well I don't know what to do then. For the first three years we used to borrow cameras in general. For example we recorded, in 2008, all festival events [name of the festival] without our own



cameras [...] And we didn't even have a penny to pay for cassettes. And somehow there were people who wanted to help us, who helped us and lent their equipment.

The network creates a mutual reserve of power that is used during production process. Each singular institution involved in the project brings also its own network of contacts and acquaintances, increasing the scale and, at the same time, making the reserve of resources bigger. It is that field that work in festival production merges with personal life. It does not consume personal life as in the case of overwork, where there is no time for personal life, but it actually merges with it.

Bartek: The simplest definition. If you know you come to your favourite pub and you sit at the bar and you greet the bartender and he pours you a pint of beer and the cask is empty and he says: - you know what, I need to bring another cask from the back, and you say: - I'll help you; and you carry that cask, the two of you and that's a totally different relationship. You've already been to the back of that bar, haven't you? And this is a bar example, a pub example, but it works everywhere. And you were a volunteer for him for a sec, you scarified a moment for free, but you must be aware that since then when you come to him and say – shit, I've got a problem, I don't know, I want to throw a party in the pub, yes, in your pub, I need to rent a pub and he says – oh come on, we know each other, don't we? You don't have to rent a pub, but we'll arrange a date suitable for both of us. I'll give you some discount at the bar. And that's how it works.

Contacts and acquaintances made outside work get the character of production means. Friends and acquaintances are also potential co-workers and resource that you may refer to if you need to. Professional and unprofessional relationships become impossible to differentiate.

Dawid: This is a group... a big festival, many events, so it isn't like that you have to get something out of the blue, but they have a contract with a particular sound company, particular logistic company which will transport portaloos and the one which will bring fences and the security and catering companies.

Relaying on personal contacts of employees is highly uncertain both in terms of quality and availability of service and resources. They are also limited in terms of a scope. Hence, the better and more certain financial support, the bigger the tendency to replace the cooperation relayed on personal contacts with formal contracts that specify the terms and conditions and, last but not least, personal relationships of an employee are replaced by relationships and contacts of an organising institution.

### **Between self-organisation and bureaucracy**

The main difficulty in describing festival labour process is the variety of cases. Among analysed festivals there were both: those of which organisation resembled a complex, bureaucratic institution and those, more or less accidentally, organised chaotically and on the spot. In our view, that variety is not a coincidental variation, but it represents a process that we will try to show using Weber's category of bureaucracy. Max Weber described bureaucracy as the most characteristic for modern societies and institutions type of public administration. In general, bureaucracy is a kind of organisation based on formal laws and rules, written documentation, strictly defined functions assigned to particular posts, a hierarchical organisation and a system of delineated lines of authority. Bureaucratic authority is in the hands of professionals who hold particular posts and who are in power only because of their positions and in the framework of the post. Bureaucracy as such is an ideal model which never appears in a pure form. We do not mean to show whether or not festivals are bureaucratic, but we use that term to describe the changes and variety of production processes. Hence, we will rather talk about bureaucratisation. At the same time, bureaucratisation will mostly interest us as a form of power – the way to control labour process – rather than *rationalisation* of the labour process. This is because we are going to analyse the labour process not from the angle of its effectiveness, which is characteristic for managerial theory, but as a field of production and reproduction of specific social relationships and subjectivity.

In a direct relation to bureaucracy we would like to put “autonomy of productive synergy of immaterial labour” – that is self-organising creative cooperation that serves as post-Fordist form of production process. It does not mean, though, a simple opposition between spontaneity and organisation, but an analysis of mutual relationships and dependency between hierarchy and autonomy in the case of festival industry.

The beginnings of many festivals, like the first steps in the festival industry, for

many of our interviewees are relatively small cultural events of a limited financial support from the outside and of a vestigial formal organisation, and they are organised by a group of enthusiasts.

Dawid: I liked that freedom and the fact there was no such a big responsibility, because they weren't millions from sponsors and a commitment like: the logo must be of such size and here and here... because there were a few small sponsors maybe plus a tiny donation from a city council and it just simply was going on rather, I don't know, it took its course somehow. And, yeah, the cooperation of, in fact, many people.... "Hey dude, I need a computer screen. Would you lend me one?". It worked like that, know what I mean? So it was cool, but on the other hand that lack of professionalism sometimes pissed me off, because,... I don't know... a girl didn't bring it or she got bored, you know what I mean? And she didn't tell us. Or somebody made a poster and sent some data to make brochures, but everything was without vectors I just... had to... simply cut it in photoshop... and I don't know, such a bullshit, isn't it?

For independence from sponsors (private and public), who while financing festivals expect also some profits, you need to pay with the necessity of relying on your own resources and personal relationships in order to get the necessary means of production. On the other hand, the informal organisation of cooperation does not give a lot of opportunities to enforce the fulfilment, making their employees directly dependent on other people's good will.

Krystyna: Yeah, and here we're like... we also divide the tasks, they are sometimes fluid. This year... my main task were artists... it means looking for artists, looking for theatres, contact with artists and collecting also, but not full-time, but gradually collecting promo materials, hotels – this was my whole department. And then all those other issues like ordering, I don't know, a tent, some permits or documents to get and stuff like that.

The division of tasks changes rather into personal "departments" than specific posts. The "departments" often have a very heterogeneous scope of tasks depending on predispositions and skills of an employee. It does not have to mean, though, that an

employee can each time choose what he or she wants to do. The division of tasks in that case depends rather on the feeling of responsibility than on personal preferences, but it often offers an opportunity for a more comprehensive involvement and development.

A position of a volunteer or an employee is of special kind in such a situation, because it adds to the production process not only “workforce”, but the whole set of necessary resources such as contacts, skills and own ideas. A position of an employee in reference to an organiser/employer is respectively stronger (on the other hand, they cannot – at least financially – expect much, or in general anything from them).

Amelia: Yeah, yeah surely yes and it is generally something, something that in general is incredibly pleasant on the one hand, but on the other it's hard and challenging. There I'm really not some role player and I don't have tasks to perform and nothing more, but it's fine because it's a thing that is being created and it's still at a nascent stage... Only the third edition. There're two guys who organise it plus some other people on demand. It is like because of it or thanks to it... Really you can do there a lot, you can have your own ideas and implement them and you can participate in a discussion, because it's obvious that you can't do it with the rest, because it's something that is like functioning for years, so they don't need new ideas, they need someone who maintains and the [name of the festival] is just.... an opportunity for some creativity, for designing your own projects, for that when I do debuts I always try to consult it, because I'm not sure where are the borders of all that, what I can and can't do, but it happened to me many times that some of my ideas were accepted whether those related to artists who were supposed to come or, I don't know, places for events or anything, that you can do there a lot, because it's a new thing, a new institution, there're not many people and you can really develop yourself.

In such a form, the process of festival labour does not reduce an employee to just a role of a contractor, but it gives an opportunity for a real cooperation in the decision making process, “you can participate in a discussion” instead of reducing you to “nothing else but a role player” as the author of the above-cited quote pointed out. An element of novelty of an event is also important: when everyone takes their first steps and paves the way, they all take more egalitarian positions – no one can make claims to knowledge, experience and successful solutions that have been worked out in previous years.

Julia: So in a very general way: we've run short of time, energy and a bit like enthusiasm that we had and then everything... because then we did everything on our own... organised everything by ourselves. So we used of course our own computers, cars, phones and everything at our own expense, so we paid extra energy and also money, and on the basis of those experiences we knew that the next edition had to be organised in a more professional way, certainly.

Grass roots and self-organising, and to some extent self-financing process of production turns out to be extremely tiresome: physically, emotionally and financially. Even if it does not discourage everyone, it does impose limits on the scale and consequently on the stability of a festival that is being organised. According to the dominant opinion, big events require simply a bigger control over the production process (Anna: [...] the festival started to change a bit, to grow a bit. And somehow also organisationally they decided to change like the way the organisation had worked and then the post of a producer appeared). Another factor is an interaction with others who expect the existence of formal institutions: (Julia: it was the time that they needed such an event and they were also happy with the organisation, so maybe they would have been interested in that, but we had to begin from a different angle, so the one that we represented some organisation), or eventually expectations and habits of employees themselves (Karolina: [people] expect a boss to give them some structure, to enforce the tasks, to supervise and in general to do the things that normally a steward used to do). On the other hand, there are cases of active opposition against bureaucratisation processes:

Karolina: Me, unlike my colleagues, had worked in many places before I established [name of the institution] and I know what I didn't want it in my life anymore. I didn't want a corporation-like discipline nor corporation-like logics, in general, I didn't want a lot of things which I think are bad for me and any other people. That's why [name of the institution] since the beginning was also that organisation in which I really experimented with human patience. Because I decided not to introduce any structure, hierarchy and to manage it chaotically.

The idea of culture as being so much different than economy – not only in regard of produced goods, but also in terms of the organisation of labour process – remains very

strong. In the above-cited quote the assumption is rooted in previous experiences (one can assume an experience of working in a corporation), hence, it gains a particularly conscious and radical form. However, even among less experienced employees of cultural industry and with their admiration for “professionalism” – an acceptance of bureaucratic structures has its visible boundaries.

Bartek: In fact, suddenly a company has been hired and it's good and bad, suddenly the event company has been hired, the company that organises the festival. It is like that, that there is, how to say it, a bureau of the festival organisation, which has hired the event company, which organises the festival and like in between, I mean... between the bureau and volunteers there's that company. And that's all. And on the one hand it's good, because the festival benefited a bit, because organisation is better and many things are better thought through, but on the other hand some creative fun has been changed into a company standard. Ok, we come to you, and ok, we've got in our offer such and such solutions. And then for those tasks there is a reserve of people, that is volunteers are needed.

Bureaucratisation changes most of all the character of relationships between people in the production process, giving them more instrumental and rational character: “for those tasks there is a reserve of people, that is volunteers are needed. Mutual relationships – both outside and inside become more formal and more precisely regulated. Divisions – either functional or hierarchical – become more fixed. Personal “departments” and areas of responsibility changed into posts that are parts of departments. Employees' contacts and ideas are replaced by hired subcontractors and offers of ready solutions.

Dawid: This is a group... a big festival, many events, so it isn't like that you have to get something out of the blue, but they have a contract with a particular sound company, particular logistic company which will transport portaloos and the one which will bring fences and the security and catering companies. And you get from them all contacts and they know exactly, they have a schedule and they know when to bring you stuff, but you still need to supervise them and .... in a way it's about getting it, about control how and what and where [...] It is like guarding your.... possessions. And to be sure that an exhibition will take place

without any clash and that everything is plugged in, that no one is killed and that everything is according to the programme and technical readers and that there's no... I don't know any faux pas.

For those employees who keep quite a high level of independence, work of co-organising a festival – “designing and organising” becomes a work of control – “guarding possessions” – possessions that in fact belong in total to organisers (even if rather rented than their own).

Maja: Because most of volunteers don't have any contact with something like that [organisation of a festival], for example... because these are different, different sections and there is, for example, a section of giving... if there, pin a badge, that... ushers in cinemas or leafleters or, as I told you: a gofer .... there's a lot of that sections.

On the other hand, a new class of employees, or more precisely volunteers, is being developed; they are given only simple and routine tasks, like a gofer. They are separated from the conceptual element of production process and they work in exchange for free admission to all festival events.

Franciszek: And here like the most important person, who resolves all those conflicts is the director of the guest department, who is like a boss of us all, you can say. He is directly responsible to [name of the director of the festival], alternatively to the managing director, so also a very important person. And he or she solves those problems [...] And she solves them very quickly, because there's no time to, like, discuss thoroughly some matters, it is only very clearly shown what you've done wrong and sometimes what to do not to make the same mistake again.

Finally, with the posts a hierarchy develops – a chain of command giving supervisors the right to supervise and correct the work of employees. The meaning of a term “being responsible” also changes. As in self-organisational processes it meant mostly “being responsible for” (that or another element of a festival), here it means also “being responsible to” (a manager, a director). Personal responsibility is replaced by institutional

accountability.

Maja: he's my friend now... he busted his arse, because his coordinator, who should have been doing something, couldn't grasp it. Anyway there was plenty of work and he was a volunteer, but he was doing as much as people who were paid for that. And people who were paid for that did virtually nothing and they didn't find fulfilment in it, and he... he said that if they didn't offer him salary next year he wouldn't work...because he felt being abused this year. Because some handshake with some director is not everything sometimes. And good fun is good, but....

However, bureaucratic organisation could successfully function without the support of self-organising process, which it tries to control. In a situation when official structures and hierarchy fail, it is the personal engagement and initiative of people who formally hold ordinary posts that saves the situation. The cause of the feeling of being abused from the above-cited quote is that the bureaucratic production process needs a grass roots engagement, but at the same time it neither recognises it nor rewards it.

### **The labour process: control and autonomy**

Bartek: And the coolest thing I heard from the director of the festival, who was at the same time my instructor, goes something like this: "take care of it, it has to be done right, I'm not familiar with it, but if it goes wrong, then you're screwed."

Task organization is the most typical form of organization of labour for the festival production process, elliptically summarized in the above-cited quote. The director (a producer, a coordinator, etc.) instructs the employees to perform a specific task and leaves them discretion as to how to do it. Only the outcome is being evaluated. One should not be fooled by the facetious nature of the director's utterance – an employee who fails to fulfil the assigned tasks can actually be "screwed" in one way or another. Task assignment is at the same time assigning responsibility for a particular element or aspect of the festival production process. It is a call for independent – autonomous – acting, but "the tone" is that of the people who were in executive command under Taylorization;"



Stanisław: [...] in fact, apart from getting a package of films which I had to show and just some order, a division into days, it's basically, it's been rather such, such voluntariness and it is how we deal with it, no one was suggesting anything to us and, what's more, no one had time to sit with us and talk to us.

The utterance quoted above describes the typical process of task assigning: a manager or a co-ordinator presents to the volunteer (in this case) a result to be obtained or a goal to be achieved. The task is defined by what is relevant to the whole course of the event: the content ("the film package") and the time frame ("the division into days"); the volunteer receives certain resources to use which he or she has to complement with his or her own input (Stanisław: [about the same job]: We basically got a pub, we got the films, and it was on us to organise the equipment). It is also worth noting that in the case of more complex tasks, an employee can sometimes choose their co-workers/subjects themselves.

Bartek: Because if, for example, someone wants to make a presentation which is large, and all his or her achievements, and he or she has it on a drive that is not portable, then you need to find an adapter. On the other hand, if someone has the presentation on a CD or on a removable drive, then you can give him your laptop and that will also work, huh. It all depends on how experienced your people are... sometimes it is like, for example, some, let's say, coordinator of the technical department, who is responsible for such live performances, panics, and a volunteer comes and says – but I have a laptop like this, and so on, takes it out and half a second later the problem is solved.

At the same time, not all tasks are a result of the management's assignment – much of it appears in an unexpected way during the production process. In such cases, an employee cannot – in the common perception of our interviewees – wait for someone to tell them to settle the matter, but they must show their own initiative. The above-cited example shows the importance of the sense of responsibility (the volunteer's attitude) over the institutional responsibility ("coordinator, who is responsible for such performances, panics"). In a changing and unpredictable festival environment, labour organization could not function effectively without such a form of self-organisation.

Antoni: I had to organise the work myself and I was immediately thrown into a mode that you just get a job and you know what you have to do, that is ahead of you there is a goal, which is to create an exhibition, you get a list of artists and what you need to do is to make this exhibition open, and there is no one above you to say what steps you have to take to achieve it. It is totally... the way I work here depends on me. Of course, I come here to the office and sit however many hours, but it is not like I come to sit from 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The labour process at a festival grants the employees a high degree of autonomy – the way they work depends on them – they do not have to stick to any imposed procedures, fixed hours, or a designated place of work, etc. as long as they will be able to fulfil the task. An employee organises, performs and controls the course of their work themselves. On the one hand, it gives the possibility of adapting the work to suit one's needs, preferences (e.g. interviewees spoke of preference for night work) or other activities (e.g. study, work, labour, etc.). On the other hand, it imposes on the employees a necessity to submit their actions to the conditions of the task performance: self-organisation; self-discipline; independent, critical evaluation of the results of their own work (Bartek: everyone says: great, awesome and so on, and you say to yourself – shit, and so many things are still faulty) – in other words, to manage themselves. This so-called 'responsible autonomy' replaces the external supervision of the internal work.

Dawid: And it [working with a more experienced worker] was cool because I got to know her work technique a little and she is really very organized, also... a lot, it gave me a lot because I jotted down on my computer a variety of her... I do not know... methods, which still help me at work... and experience too.

A high degree of autonomy in the workplace allows to maintain control over the development of one's skills. Independence creates many opportunities to learn and develop one's professional skills (Krystyna: I had a great decisiveness in my actions. I've learned many things.). At the same time, it adds independent work organisation skills to the repertoire of the necessary technical and administrative skills. The festival organisers only occasionally invest in the skill development of their employees, giving them instead an opportunity to acquire new and broaden the existing skills during the labour process.

The following statement illustrates this situation as a kind of exchange between the organisers and the employees:

*PK: Does the employer invest in the development of your skills?*

Bartek: You know, does he or she invest in my development... yes, but it is still, you see... I see as the same investment that, for example, I can do something my own way. Because it's an alternative cost. Someone... This is the so-called risk management. If I do something well my own way, I will learn a lot, but if doing... and it will be well done. If I fuck it up, then sometimes I will learn even more, but the event bears a great risk.

The festival organisers take on the risk of high employee autonomy – a worker “doing things her own way” can make mistakes that threaten the course and the quality of the festival. On the other hand, the organisers do not have to invest in the acquisition and development of the professional skills of their employees, as they are required to obtain them on their own, through experience.

Krystyna: I was responsible, in general, for ordering the catalogues, flyers, and posters, as well... For me, it was the first, at all, clash with this world of printing... that there are some paper weights, dimensions... Of course it seems obvious now, but then I was so... “Mother of god, just...”

*PK: “What to choose?”*

Krystyna: Yes, how am I... um... how am I to judge, how am I supposed to know that, also... not here, it was erring, almost completely.

This tendency to combine work with learning a profession is sometimes a cause of stress and worry. The above quotation shows how even relatively simple (looking back from the perspective of already accumulated experience) tasks can be a problem, when they are performed for the first time. The tasks performed by an autonomous employee should therefore also include continual learning of their profession.

## External control

Natalia: And it's actually that moment of inspection that is really scary, it comes at the very end, and then comes the evaluation of work that one has done, and often it turns out that at the end you've done something wrong, without realizing it, especially if you're working for the first time in such a system and you don't know how to do things, and then various problems and conflicts, associated with it, arise.

The most important method of the external work control used in the festival production process is the control over the outcome. As evidenced by the quote cited above, this control may take the form of a very stressful moment of "evaluation" of the finished "work": we are dealing here with a technician responsible for the realisation of individual elements of the festival. Where an employee is responsible for some more general aspect, rather than for a particular element (e.g. logistics, accommodation, volunteers, media relations, etc.), the control over the results involves an expectation of a smooth course of the event and becomes relevant only when any noticeable abnormalities (e.g., delays, problems with accommodation etc.) begin to appear. Any more detailed (and more stressful) work evaluation usually comes after the event has finished.

Anna: Because I also employ, for any spot where the performances take place, a man who needs to be there from the beginning to the end. And he sits there. He gets from me like a package, so the equipment is rented, place. Everything is agreed upon, but at the venue he needs to talk with the team and make sure that what I arranged before actually happens.

In the case of larger and more bureaucratic festivals (the above example comes from one of the largest Polish theatre festivals) monitoring the work results takes on a more systematic form of "keeping an eye on" the relatively autonomous ("everything is agreed upon") labour process.

Dawid: [...] someone didn't get the speakers – even though they said they will have speakers – so we have to quickly rent some others, and it's... summer is just a festival boom and it is extremely difficult to get the equipment, so... I

just got a speaker for 2000PLN, terribly expensive, and that, for example, was not in the budget. So it was a little fuck-up.

The second commonly used form of external control of the labour process is the determination of its limits which cannot be crossed. It regards the limitations of time ("deadline") and means (finances, equipment and human resources) that are at the employee's disposal. The quotation cited above shows that the female employee responsible for a specific element of the festival has the freedom to take any steps which will lead to success, but if she crosses the set limits (in this case: the budget), there is a "fuck-up". Crossing set limits gives the supervisors a reason to start a detailed control of the course of the labour process and the validity of decisions made (in the above example: an employee had to explain the reasons for such a large sum of money), destroying the illusion of full autonomy and reminding of the functioning hierarchical relationships.

If we look again at the presented examples of the working of external control mechanisms (Anna: then created various problems and conflicts associated with it. Dawid: So there was a little mess), we will find that they are the place where conflicts between the employees and the organisers (being, in relation to them, the employers) manifest themselves. It is in these moments where the hierarchical structure of the festival bursts into the relatively autonomous labour process, confirming its subsumption under the prevailing relations of production, and reminding of the fundamentally heteronomous character of wage labour, which we wrote about at the beginning.

### **The subjective effects of the labour process**

The relationship between the conditions of the labour process, a high degree of autonomy, and the subjectivity of the employees can be described as a special normative control mechanism, substituting more direct forms of labour control in the festival production process. If the project is to be successful, the employee must contribute to it not only their work and skills, but also their creativity, intelligence, ability to react to unexpected situations and to independently take actions vital under given circumstances without expecting orders from above, and ultimately their communicative skills and personality. These are things that cannot be enforced by supervision. This is why the management of people in the festival production process is oriented not to supervise their

behaviour, but to instil a sense of responsibility in them. Employing people to work at a festival is not just a simple act of selling labour force:

Antonina: I completely devoted myself to the festival, I was willing to sacrifice everything for it [...] because if you want to commit so completely, totally, with your whole self, it is obvious that, just as at the [name of the festival] festival, I wanted to be at every concert, I wanted to be in the office every day and help and do everything I was asked to.

Taking a job at a festival has a nature of a commitment, both emotional and moral. It means more than a contract or even a help offer (in the case of the volunteers), it means taking on personal responsibility for the realisation of the event. Of course, the sense of responsibility for the whole festival, though undoubtedly important, is secondary to the more specific responsibility for one's own "share" – that is, an assigned or selected element, or an aspect of the festival (or just a series of specific tasks) with which the worker has to deal personally. The process of task division is therefore a one of dividing the areas of responsibility, both in the institutional – that is, what one will be accounted for – and moral sense – as a moral obligation. Balanced against the responsibility taken on by the employees, is the trust placed in them by the management:

Krystyna: Also... Oh yes, there is such a... I do not have someone who checks on me all time and that I only do things like... as if I... one could say that even at [the name of the festival], where I was with them... no it's not like it's an important function. However, I get technical riders, so they have a great confidence in me because... but... They know that I will gather everything and that everything will be in place. So I have my freedom here, I plan each hour myself... how, when, what, where... I myself am responsible for, I don't know, arranging things with the driver. I'm responsible for it all, also... I don't feel like this great control or something here. These are just my jobs.

Stanisław: One is, let's say, a relatively grown-up person and one has to get a grip of the situation.

In this process of moral exchange, which could be defined as *control by subjectification* or normative control, the management placing trust in a worker, recognizes them as a moral agent, an adult, a competent and responsible person. The employee in turn, recognizing himself or herself in this interpellation, takes responsibility, transforming the target designated by the director into his or her personal goal. In this way, the “the worker's soul can become part of the factory.” The employees, seeing that they are treated as responsible people, they themselves try to behave well at work so as not to disappoint the trust placed in them.

Dawid: And I like that... I'm very responsible there, I have to be a responsible person and I decide about things. And when you give someone a possibility of decision-making, of being a decisive person in some questions, one is more motivated.

Each commissioned job is at the same time an assignment of certain responsibility, an employee taking up a job becomes personally responsible for a particular element or aspect of the festival. We have already written about the importance the sense of personal responsibility has on the functional, as well as the hierarchical division of labour in the festival production process.

Dawid: And the girl who was the paid manager of the room was probably pregnant or .. I do not know, she had children and was hardly ever there. So the chick got paid from the grant, right? From like... the foundation funds and I worked my arse off for her.

The sense of responsibility constitutes a mechanism of self-organisation of the labour process, relatively independent of any formal and hierarchical divisions, as best evidenced by the fact that it is able to replace them when these structures fail.

Krystyna: It is an approach that is a bit... on the one hand – to put it in the resume, but also I have a feeling that this is not only a matter of looking for experience, but only of getting a badge and maybe a possibility to just get in... just that. Because I see... like these situations where someone applies to be a volunteer and works only one shift, for example, a four-hour one. The festival

lasts, I do not know, five days, and such a person appears only once, he or she gets the badge, and I see them on all shows, they just want to be able to get in.

In opposition to a responsible entity, committed and trustworthy, there is an opportunistic person, commonly recurring as a negative hero of our interviewees' narrative. The opportunistic subject (not necessarily a volunteer) is only interested in the benefits (such as a free participation in the festival), they do not want to do more than necessary, do not feel responsible for anything and do not share the enthusiasm. Without close supervision, such a person cannot be relied on and turns out to be completely useless in the context of the festival labour process.

Hanna: Because if there are no strict orders – one person will feel responsible and do a lot and another, as I said before, will do 1/4 and at the end will say, “what a festival we've organised”, won't they? And they would say, for example, “this festival wasn't organising but rather rescuing what was left.” And always “we did, we went, we laid the tracks in front of the City Hall”, right? They would only stand and look how my [name of a person] with... at 4 am.... the boys are laying tracks that were brought there from [name of a city].

The organisation of labour based largely on the sense of personal responsibility and limited control, put the committed people in an unfavourable position with respect to the opportunistic ones. The latter take advantage of the benefits from the participation in the festival production (such as a free admission or simply claiming credit for the organisation, as in the above-cited example) by taking on a disproportionately small amount of work. Generally, a hardly repressive atmosphere of labour process also makes it impossible to discipline such people (Krystyna: [about an opportunistic volunteer] And, well, you know we can't do anything about it... I can't say “look, but you only came once”). Hence, the labour process works best when it is carried out by a committed community:

Mateusz: And when you see such commitment on the other side, not only concerning the purchase of drinks or getting materials, but people who will read all the texts and look for typos, apart from that they will capture every senseless thing written there. Working with such a person motivates you and



you know it's a priority, and other things are... I think it is like when generally at work you see somebody's commitment, then you yourself want to commit more.

Shared enthusiasm and commitment are the key to a good work atmosphere. The people who are committed motivate one another and constitute examples for one another. Achieving such an atmosphere is, above all, a matter of an appropriate selection of participants of the labour process:

Dawid: I try to be nice rather than commanding. But on the other hand, I keep a distance because... it is immediately obvious what's a person's attitude to work, isn't it? If they came here to swagger or if they came to do something substantial. And then with such people I immediately establish contact. With the others I do not even know if I give them a chance to prove themselves, because I see that as I talk, they are looking at something else? So I do not even want to waste time on them. I know, for example, that tomorrow they will be gone. So I try just to say warmly "look, here's the deal," and it's like cooperation, not that I command you. We are working on the project together, so we have to help each other, right?

Recognising people manifesting the right attitude is essential not only in the recruitment process but also in the labour process. It allows to separate the valuable co-workers, on which you can rely, from the opportunists, which can only be a source of conflict and difficulties.

## **Recapitulation**

The festival labour process, though diverse in terms of the level bureaucracy, is characterised, however, by high degree of the employee's autonomy and an advantage of normative controls over the external ones. A festival employee is expected to be independent and maintain control over their work and, at the same time, treat the tasks assigned to them as a personal responsibility. Without this sense of responsibility, the organisation of the production process, reduced to a formal hierarchy, would not be able to function effectively in a changing and thoroughly engaging festival work

environment. The organisers of the production process are therefore forced to create the conditions for the functioning of the employees' autonomy, while strictly controlling the results of the labour process, thus confirming their inalienable right to an exclusive disposal of the product.